

PERSIAN PICTURES

MARY F. LABAREE

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Persian Pictures

BY

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FOREWORD

OF all the tragic uprootings of the Great War years, none has been more tragic than the uprooting in the fertile little plain of Urumia, Persia.

I have two human means of comfort in my sorrow. One is the hope of the larger life to be lived and the larger service to be rendered by Urumia in days to come. The other is to picture the pre-war days with their background of open plain, caravan and motley herd, fruit gardens, vineyards and grain-blest foothills, snowcapped peaks and great blue lake.

Yet even so I cannot blot from my memory the painful tales poured into my ears by haggard refugees. Nor can I forget the crumbling heaps of adobe that once sheltered those I loved.

After God's healing, my real solace is the hope that I may have a tiny share in the upbuilding of the new age in Persia, as I was privileged to have had in the old era and early war days, from 1904-1915.

My little sketches are, I believe, faithful to history, tradition, custom and atmosphere in Urumia and Tabriz. I have not attempted a complete set of pictures, but I trust that the true Persian color may be sensed and the years of suffering realized by those who read.

M. F. L.

Lincoln University, Pa.
1920

To
R. M. L.

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GLOSSARY

Beg—*Kurdish title*

Bey—*Turkish title*

bushalla—*sour milk soup*

caravanserai—*inn*

chinar—*plane tree*

farsakh—*Modern Persian, 2 3/4 miles*

farsang—*Old Persian for farsakh*

feitun—*victoria, used with raised hood when occupied by ladies*

fourgon—*Russian wagon, like a prairie schooner*

Hakim Sahib—*Foreign Doctor*

Iran—*Persia*

Irani—*Persian*

Ibn Sina—*Avicenna*

kabob—*meat roasted on a spit*

Kaloo—*bride (daughter-in-law or young married woman)*

Kassids—*messengers*

Khan—*nobleman, inn*

Khanum—*lady*

Kheltu Sota—*Old Auntie*

Layli and Majnun—*classical lovers of the Near East*

Malik—*headman of a village or group of villages*

Moujik—*Russian peasant*

Nizaam—*Persian title*

Pood—*Russian, 36 lbs.*

Sirdar—*Persian title*

tandur—*fire pit used for cooking and heating*

tar—*Persian musical instrument*

verst—*Russian, 2/3 mile*

The ram's horn is used in religious processions during Moharrem, the month of mourning for the Moslem saints.

Village Life

AT THE SPRING

WHERE the gentle spring flows down
 Into the waiting pool,
Gather the village women,
 The girls, the boys and the fool,
And the men on their way to the harvest field,
 While yet the day is cool.

The women and girls bear water jars,
 The boys bring the big eyed calf,
And the knobby dusty buffaloes
 For their long blissful bath,
The mare and her rider quench their thirst.
 And the fool? Oh, he makes them laugh!

MILKING TIME

IN the dappled willow shadow,
 By the cooling stream,
Kheltu Sota, rosy Kaloo
 Gossip, knit and dream;
Till the flock pours down the mountain,
 In dust dies the dream,
And they fill the foaming milk pots,
 By the cooling stream.

AT SET OF SUN

AT set of sun, tall shepherd, eager dog
Conduct their dark brood down the mountain side.
They linger near the willows by the stream,
Till sheep and goats are claimed by waiting brides.

The women and girls with thirsty bulging jars
Slung from their shoulders, gather at the spring.
What bright eyed laughter, interplay of wit!
The gloaming would unfold its shadowy wings.

And now the sun-worn village men return
With wearied oxen, from the threshing floor.
The evening star, a candle in God's hand,
Lights up steep paths to many an unbarred door.

They eat their bread and curds and climb to the roof,
To rest until white dawn nears red sunrise:
Lulled with the song of watchmen by the wheat,
The glory of heaven breathing on their eyes.

DOLI

THE pour of a sun-quicken'd day
Is on gold wheat fields that to gardens stray,
Walled fruit to vineyard, mud village, blue lake
And the marvellous meaning that is at stake
In the curve of the rounding rhythmical shore
Of bay on bay, forevermore.

A SCENE IN RESHIKAN

WE dreamed along through the hot, bright days,
(With a plunge in the sapphire lake.)
Till the cool of night slid over the hills,
And the stars began to wake.

But one day a rumble and roll were heard,
And the trample of stallions fine:
A Khanum veiled in a *feitun*, came,
Servants galloping front and behind.

The village men quickly turned away,
For a lady's face may not be seen.
She rested *en route* to her country seat,
By the willows grey and green.

A courteous whitebeard gently came,
And proffered profound salaams,
And told her he had been headman once,
For her father the noble Nizaam.

Then off they dashed at a madcap pace,
And we strolled back to our tea;
While the women squatted down in the dust,
And talked of the wonderful She.

EVEN SONG

COME, seek the roof beneath the stars—
The day was so intolerably bright.
We need the touch of heaven sent winds,
We need the solace of the night.

Come, sit and dream here, with the stars—
They are so near to us on summer eves.
Let us forget the blinding threshing floor,
The oxen treading out the scattered sheaves.

• • • • • • • •

Now we will sleep among the stars—
And the wild watchdogs call us not to fight.
We need the healing touch of heaven sent winds,
We need the mighty solace of the night!

IN THE VINEYARD

I tiptoe down between straight vineyard hills,
In search for treasure 'neath the broad leaf rims.
I find my jewel globes, all delicately hid—
A very Christmas tree turned outside in.

And shall I sip their nectar, or gaze off
To quaff the mightier draught of burnished vine
Flash rank on rank across the patient plain
To sheltering poplars, sapphire heaven ashine?

THE HERD BOYS

THE wide blue sky, the dewy plain,
The jocund morning sun
Call out the singing village boys
To bring their cattle dun,
Buffaloes, donkeys, goats and mares,
Before the heat's begun.

A clump of grapes from the vineyard,
A thin bread as they run—
And they are lords of all the plain,
Until the day is done.

THE THRESHING FLOOR

ROUND and round, the oxen slow
Trample out the goodly grain;
Up and up the winnowers toss
The chaff—wheat falls like rain.

Grow the hard won golden heaps,
Some for Master some for Man;
But the Kurds will come at nightfall,
Take all—if they can.

THE BRIDE COMES

(Kaloo Teela)

The Mountaineer's Bride

By the black stream down in the canyon floor,
Where grey terraced stone huts lurch,
At sunrise the pale girl bride is led
To the death-damp ancient church.
After hours of prayer and snuffed chant,
Both priest and deacon are paid.
As the bride and groom stoop through the door,
Salute! The bride's fusilade!

Tdoombala tdoombala,
Kaloo teela!

The Plainsman's Bride

Under veil of red and gold are tears,
Grey heart 'neath purple plush sack,
Under blue silk skirt, reluctant feet
March on to the church, alack!
The bride and her lord, and village throng
Seek the wedding feast—'tis noon.
Old drum and fife cries fillip the feet.
Today, they have just one tune—

Tdoombala tdoombala,
Kaloo teela!

The Nobleman's Bride

Beneath the star-wrought purple skies,
(As soft as her satin gown)

The bride is borne to her bridegroom strange,
Through the tangled sleeping town.
A regiment bluff of soldier lads
In their guns bear candle stars,
A regiment grave of servants bear
Heaped chests and trays. "Habardar!"

Tdoombala tdoombala,
Kaloo teela!

A SONG OF THE PLAIN

UNBROKEN yet blue as an ancient tile,
Long *farsaks*, the Persian sky
Spans all the silent sunburnt plain.
A grey Cossack flashes by
The motley village herd that seems
To pasture all alone.
But—No! Some little herd boys sleep
On pillows, Bethel stones.

SPRING IN URMI

UP from Arabia flies the grave stork
To nest in the stately *chinar*.
The bullfrogs of Urmi are many and sweet—
He steers by their chorus from far.

The iris has come and sung to the hills
Its delicate lavender hues.
A ragged young scamp has brought me a clump.
I send it to you, and to you!

THE CASTLE OF ISMAIL AGHA

ISMAIL AGHA'S castle crowns
A tall stern rocky gate—
A gorge to ancient Kurdistan,—
Forgot, it guards and waits.

Before it's weathered walls half curve
Grey rock hewn seats that look
To altar place and rising sun,
As writ in Parsee books.

(Ismail, brigand chief, stood here
To search the open plain
For overladen caravans
And princelings with rich trains.)

A cell is carved out in the peak.
A Syrian monk age-wise,
Here prayed and fasted, scourged his soul,
Long since to Paradise.

Hard by the foot of the mountain
Yet awed to due restraint,
A brick and plaster sacred tomb
Contains a Sunni saint.

The red cheeked girls on the foothills
Bear tall jars to the stream,
Care not that Magian, Christian, Kurd,
Here found God more than dream.

In Tabriz

THE ARK

The Ancient Citadel Of Tabriz

*As we come up the Julfa Road,
The Ark looms first from the plain,
To speak the might of ancient days
That have passed—nor come again.*

I.

THE Ark would lord it over the plain,
Defy the mountain red:
The might of man dare the might of God,
Forget how it was bred.

The old Ark lords it over the web
Of domed mosque, bath, bazaar,
The flat hut of the water carrier,
The Prince's palace far.

II.

The towering giant of builded brick,
Mocks his guards as they come and go.
"You're gone in a flash of little years,
I live by the centuries. Lo!

"I received my sentinel orders
From Ali Shah, Jelan.
I have kept my watch through many a reign
Of Shah and Prince and Khan.

“How earthquake, famine and pestilence
Have slaughtered crushed and bereaved!
Mad Turkoman, Osmanli have raged
Yet my watch is not relieved.

“You guard me? Impotent creature,
I guard you, I’ve guarded your sires,
I’ll guard the unborn babes of your babes,
Until come the Judgment fires.

“The governor, merchant and porter
Give thanks for the shade I afford;
The leper, the prophet’s son, son of the king
Are all my puny wards.”

III.

“Now wedding torches glimmer
Like fireflies in the streets—
Now, slow-borne biers are emptied
In rough graves near my feet.

“It’s ‘May your New Year Feast be blest,’
In laughing spring of year;
Then wail the ram’s horns for the saints—
Gashed heads, wild cries, old tears.

“I look across to the sparkling lake,
Green Urmi and Kurdistan,
And follow the road to Maraghā,
The seat of Hulaku Khan.

"I could peer into the hot cramped yards
Of cobblers and fellahs,
See rainbow ladies cull bright rose blooms
In spacious gardens of green.

"The Heir Apparent is peshwazed in—
The roofs teem with crones and girls,
Rugs cover the walls and long-coat scribes
Rub priestling and lordling and churl.

"Gay arches, a gold lace Prince, barouche,
Sleek, milky white, pink-tailed steeds,
Cerulean lackies, bottle-green guards—
A lordly chamberlain leads."

IV.

"I dare not gaze on our broken mosque,
Once dreamed to the praise of God.
Its glory of dome and blue faience
Is turning to common clod.

"The earthquake shook down its symmetry.
Time's hand heals not vital wounds,
Save human hands and warm mortal hearts
Unite to bind up the wounds.

"The good men who looked toward Mecca,
In this precious place of prayer,
Were buried beneath their earthen walls,
Could not show God that they care.

“How would Jehan Shah tear at his beard
And beat on his burning breast,
To enter the marred great portal door
And see the poor ruined nest

“Of his high pride and fierce hope of heaven,
His hunger of endless fame,
Bereft of its polished patterned blue,
Its splendor an echoed name.

“Alas for that builded wonder!
Alas for that sapphire calm
Of perfect dome and stately arch,
Our turquoise of all Islam!”

V.

“Why babble I like a dervish thing?
King’s honor is mine, long since,
Azerbaijan belongs to the Shah,
Tabriz is seat of his Prince.

“The old Vizir bade me stand watch
For foes that would march or lurk.
I halt both traitor and democrat,
I challenge Russian and Turk.

“Ancient Door of the Kingdom,
Pinnacle of Islam,
Thou shalt not pass to strangers—
I swear by each Imam!”

*Far far out on the Julfa Road,
The Ark calls back the eye,
To show the mouldered might of kings,
Who had like slaves to die.*

A TABRIZ ROOF SONG

I climb up to the roof,
My ladder to the skies,
And I forget the wedding fife
And drum and children's cries.

The roof is girt with space,
Calm stars, swift meteor lights;
I hear Sahend and Ararat
Salaam across the night.

But up on their lone hill,
Within their shrine, aloof,
Poor Ain and Zain, the holy ones,
Climb not their waiting roof.

THE TABRIZ BAZAAR

IN cool bazaars far vaulted dim,
I find old dervish runes,
Tales redolent of spice, *kabob*,
Bright hammered copper tunes.

The goldsmith and the silversmith
With turquoise and filigree,
Toil back in dingy cubby-holes,
While 'prentice boys fetch them tea.

I catch a cheery tap, tap, tap,
Where slippers wink in rows—
Gay apple-green, clear yellow, red,
Free heels and curled up toes.

The flash of tin and whiff of wood!
Great trays of sweets and seeds!
The merchant kneels as piously
As High Priest, with his beads.

The bubble of the water pipe
And clink of small tea glasses
Come mixed with cries of muleteers
The patter of grey asses.

A thunder! Gallop of Cossacks!
A coachman cries "Make way!"
A lord rides out with his lackies,
Black-shrouded women stray.

An archway painted green and red!
A caravan unloads—
A jumble of bales and camels,
Cloaked camel men, merchants robed.

The high domed rug bazaar is tuned
To a stately mellow measure.
Here Ferakhan and Hamadan
Have heaped and hung their treasure.

L'ENVOI

O wizardry
Of old Tabriz!
Thou breath'st on
Mingled men,

On caravan and arch and court,
Musk, brazier glow, strange din,
On vaulted, shadowed ways flung far,
And, Lo! A magical BAZAAR!

THE ETERNAL SONG

THE chant of the wandering bazaar,
Is muted in my heart,
I find the song eternal
In the music of the mart.

I hear no more the hammer lilts
And tea house jargonry,
Nor sketch long profiles, low bent backs,
And ripe rug mystery.

True, caravans from old Baghdad,
Still bring tales, cloth of gold,
From Al Raschid to Nasr-ud-Din,
Grave, magical, comical, bold.

The *fourgons* from the Aras,
Bring songs of Russian Nights—
Of Moscow mills, Caucasian feuds,
Mad moujiks, Cossak fights.

But, down beneath these surface themes,
Throbs out the eternal song
Of souls that march and seek and search.
They'll *find*—though the road be long!

War Time

THE NIGHTINGALE IN THE COLLEGE
COMPOUND

June 1914

WHITE pillars silvered by the clear moonbeams,
Were lost in leafy groining overhead.
The lofty nave was waiting to be led
In worship.

When from the fastness of a hidden shrine,
There came a melody rapt and divine,
The silence of the listening night
To bless.

God's benison of peace in joy and pain,
Ecstatic moon—bright threnodies contained.
What litanies of longing, they had fain
Revealed!

Or was it prophecy, that we might know
How soon that place of peace would overflow
With wounds of anguished refugees
To heal?

IN THE CITY YARDS

THEY were harried, they were hounded,
They fell, ran, hid, and crawled;
But fifteen thousand found a place
Within mud mission walls.

They came with torn and frozen feet,
And brains that reeled with fear.
They came with sorrow-strangled hearts,
Too dazed, too spent for tears.

The Kurds raged at the sheltering flag
And cursed the big barred gate.
The stricken crowds begged God's good might—
He stayed the cries of hate.

A five months' weary vigil
Was kept with bated breath,
With filth and typhus, hunger, dread,
With prayer and birth and death.

A SONG FOR THE DAUGHTERS

THE fathers are bowed and the mothers weep,
But not for the dear new dead,
Who rest in the Paradise of God,
Beyond all torture and dread.

The heart-break and the mourning cry,
Now spring from a deeper pain—
For the daughters in wild impious hands,
Who have gone—nor come again.

THE DAY OF BLOOD IN KURDISTAN

I stood upon St. Mary's rock,
Above the Zab's jade flow,
And saw where Christ's little flock was flung,
Not too many years ago.

There, I sang a song of thanksgiving,
From the sacred rock to the sky,
That Badir Khan's cubs had not suckled his hate,
That the Day of Blood had gone by.

Yet now in those mountain valleys,
The Day of Blood has tolled,
And His flock hemmed in by peak and hate,
Fight for their babes and folds.

I wait for the breathless messenger.
What tidings will he bring?
May some be left to bear his name,
When the last death cry rings!

THE LEADERS OF THE ARMY

THE *Sirdar* learned of the cunning fox,
His sword was the sword of Orion.
The *Malik* was swift as the Zab at flood,
His heart was the heart of a lion.

THE LITTLE SYRIAN ARMY

THE men from stern high
Mountain valleys stood
With men of border plains,
As bold men should.

They fought like ancient Rustem caught at bay—
The khaki army came not, God spoke not.
One month in fourteen battles they won life,
And in those fourteen battles they won death.

The men from stern high
Mountain valleys, stood
With men of border plains,
As bold men should.

THE WINTER FLIGHT TO RUSSIA

THE hurrying multitudes flee from the sword
Of the hate-fed bands of the Prophet's horde.
With bleeding feet, they stumble along,
Crying unto the Lord.

And out from the throng all harried by fear,
Fall the old, babes, mothers too spent for tears.
Their souls flutter up to His hand so near,
Up to the hand of the Lord.

At night, they drop on the mud and snow.
Who will be left to arise and go,
When the pale dawn light begins to show?
Who will be left, O Lord?

A WINTER DIRGE

IT was cold and barren winter,
When surged a black spring flood,
To hunt and crush, and fatten
Upon our bread and blood.

If it had been golden summer,
The dead had not lain near and far,
On the road that leads from Urmia
Up to the land of the Czar.

If it had been golden summer,
The gaunt, huddled refugees

Had poured from foul rooms to roof and yard,
Not fallen like autumn leaves.

If it had been golden summer,
Our babes had hid in the grain,
And more had escaped the dagger
And the sharper captive pain.

If it had been golden summer,
Our daughters to vineyards had fled,
And safe in the deep dug, leaf-thatched rows,
Not drunk of the shame and dread.

It was cold and barren winter,
When our men and boys, on the hill,
Tied arm to arm, by their fathers' graves,
Fell. And they lie there still.

HAKIM SAHIB TO THE RESCUE

THE church became a fortress,
The fortress knew black fear,
Our cartridges were at an end,
We knew our end was near.

God sent the Hakim Sahib,
While shots flew fast and grim,
He found the Kurdish chieftain,
And parleyed long with him.

He begged our lives in mercy,
 He would not be denied.
And so we won a respite,
 And saved our babes and brides.

He led us to the city,
 Past hungry enemies.
We entered a broad gateway—
 Our hearts were on their knees.

THE SUMMER FLIGHT TO THE SOUTH

FARSANG after farsang,
 Weary verst on verst,
We plodded through the withering dust,
 With hearts that almost burst.

But Turks were in the offing,
 The Kurds we had learned too well,
The villagers along the way,
 Knew how to steal and fell.

Many stumbled to their knees,
 Or tumbled still and stark,
And others lay with fluttering lips—
 They haunt me in the dark.

THE VILLAGE HEADMAN

I.

THE winter winds charged furiously
Against the great square old adobe house.
The walls were thick, and firm as a fort,
They were reared to stand, underbuilt with stone.
He led us into the house. It was dark.
At first I could see only darkness there.
I thought I must be in a time-wrought cave,
Deep down in the heart of the earth.
Then, I began to find dim forms—
Huge wooden flour bins and burly jars,
Red wrinkled grapes from rafters hung.
(Like grapes of Askelon!)

The white-beard host said, bowing low,
"Please mount the platform where we live!"

I cannot remember the different kinds
Of meat and rice and milk foods white.
I can remember each gestured grace,
The dignity of the old bronzed face.
My tear-bottle treasures the attar bright
Of our friend's high courtesy.

II.

The Headman's stately body lies quite still,
Asleep in his hard grave upon the hill,
Beyond the village toward the sunset gold
Of New Jerusalem dreamed in days of old.
I'm glad he did not have to live to see
His sons' and grandsons' red death tragedy,
His brides and grand babes *dree* their *dree*
Upon the stony way to Calvary!

I KNOW

I know a cool, green mossy way
That leads to the forest's heart.
I know a smooth, white ribboned pike,
Where autos flash and dart.

I know a road that lingers by
The sapphire of a lake:
And near it I have found a trail
That peak- and sky-folk take.

I know a highway in Iran,
Which is new stained with red.
There, I must step with washen feet,
And tears and angel-led.

THE REFUGEE

A gully black,
A black, black night,
A cart, a dying man,
A sleeping child, a woman white
Watching for the grey dawn light.

A wagon left by fleeing folk,
Is fired and by its glow,
The vigil-keeper leans to hold
In leash the tugging soul.

(Till messengers return,
The life must burn!)

“Speed *Kassids*, speed,
As speed you may,
To the kind British camp!
Quick! Bring the light of love and skill!
There is no moon—a lamp!”

They pierce the blackness, loving haste
Is all too late, this night,
And tender vigil cannot stay
The soul of him this night,
Who would go out to meet his God,
Over the sky ways bright.

Above the gully black,
Above the black, black night,
Above the cart, the wearied form,
The child, the woman white.

BETWEEN URUMIA AND SAIN KALA

FRIEND, we are done with dying,
Now we drop down to *die*.
We are wearied of this long dying,
My little ones and I.

The cruel sun was enough to kill.
How the hunger wolves can tear!
The drowning dust and madhouse thirst,
The curse, shriek, groan and prayer!!

If only the kindly dagger
Had torn our burdened breasts,
We had long since, on downy stones,
Found our paradise of rest.

Friend, we are done with dying,
Now we drop down and *die*.
We are wearied of this . . . long . . . dying,
My little . . . ones . . . and . . . I.

A LAMENT FOR THE PATRIARCH

IN the vigor of his manhood,
Our Patriarch is gone!

In the prime of a ripening wisdom,
Who knew no fear is gone!

In the old days of peace, he sat
At the head of his judgment hall,
To mete out a kindly justice
To our men from Dizza to Chal.

In the vigor of his manhood,
The Head of our House is gone!

In the prime of a ripening wisdom,
The Pillar of our House is gone!

They climbed by pass and precipice,
By canyon and foaming ford,
To bring their tithes and wrongs to him,
Their Father in the Lord.

In the vigor of his manhood,
Our noble Judge is gone!

In the prime of a ripening wisdom,
Who righted our wrongs is gone!

And when the Turk and Kurd ringed in
His flock with rifle and gun,
He dared the bitter bloody way
To the plains of the Lion and Sun.

In the vigor of his manhood,
Our Captain and Chief is gone!

In the prime of a ripening wisdom,
Our fearless Leader is gone!

After long months of hunger,
Nakedness, fever and strife,
A pact was made—a pact of peace—
Were we again to know life?

In the vigor of his manhood,
Our tireless Shepherd is gone!

In the prime of a ripening wisdom,
With his martyred flock he is gone!

The pact was made,—and he was guest
Of a chieftain with honeyed breath,
Who, brotherly, gave him a solemn kiss,
Then—gave the signal of death.

In the vigor of his manhood,
The Head of our Nation is gone!

In the prime of a ripening wisdom,
With his bodyguard, he is gone!

In the vigor of his manhood,
Our Patriarch is gone!

In the prime of a ripening wisdom,
He whom we loved is gone!

SPRING IN URFI

BUSHALLA herbs peep over the plain,
"Crocus and iris call,
The stork has come from Araby
To nest in the plane tree tall.

But—

Gone are the visions of other springs,
Buffaloes ploughing for wheat,
Pruning in the vineyards,
New dropped lambs ableat.

Hunger wolves howl down the hills,
And hearts are quenched with dread
For the maidens snatched by *Beg* and *Bey*,
And the babes who faint for bread.

I. M.

WILLIAM A. SHEDD

WHEN he had fathered a wan host
To kindly hands and sheltering hearts,
He laid his weary body down
Upon a Red Cross cart.

He gave his gift of years and toil,
Stayed not when he had paid the price.
He laid his weary body down;
His strong soul ran to Paradise.

Ah, all too swiftly sped that soul,
Too eager for one earth-glance fleet.
We dare not mourn when he is glad,
And when his man-task was complete.

A MOTHER'S PRAYER

God, if only Thou would'st lean
Into this fire of hell,
And take my tender little ones,
My heart could cease its knell!
I can endure the wearying ways,
The scourgings and the flame.
Their tiny bodies are too frail.
Brand on *my* breast, Thy Name!

AT SALMAS AFTER THE MASSACRE OF THE
MEN

DIG the trench both wide and deep.
See how many have fallen asleep—
Fallen asleep in agony.
Cover them, poor maimed things!

Dig the trench with aching heart.
Soul and body were tortured apart.
Now they rest from their agony.
Cover them, poor maimed things!

Dig the trench! The mad women come
To find their men who came not home.
Would *they* might rest from their agony!
Weep for *them*, poor maimed things!

TODAY

BLACK is the eye,
Red is the cheek,
White is the soul
Of Shirin.

Fire is the heart,
Crimson the hand,
Dark is the soul
Of Mahmud.

Black is the sky,
Stony the trail,
Grey is the rain,
Today.

YESTERDAY AND TODAY

WHEN Alexander led his hordes,
A-trampling East and East;
The cries of brides and little ones,
Smote the godling, at his feast.

When warriors of Sassanian day
(Now rock-hewn) held Salmas,
Nestorians fled their generous plains,
Or fell before the pass.

When Hulaku swept provinces
Into his saddle-bags;
Gardens were red and vultures filled,
And gibbered heart-torn hags.

Now Kurd and Turk and power-mad Hun
Shake those age-weary ways,
And quench their thirst in new life blood,
Like lords of old dead days.

NEAR BAGHDAD

(An old mountain woman at the refugee camp is interrogated.)

“**W**HERE do you come from, mother?”
“From the mountains where free men are
born,

Where the pastures of summer touch heaven,
And the air is always at morn.”

“Mine eyes ache with this flat lowland,
I need not bread or seed-grain,
I die for the peaks of Kurdistan.
Perhaps they can still my pain.”

“Where are you going, mother?”
“To Tiari, made by the Lord.
I would go on by knees for a year of days,
By camel track, mule trail and ford.”

“My throat loathes Diala water,
I need mine own again,
I die for the springs of Kurdistan,
Perhaps they can still my pain.”

“But your stalwart sons, dear mother?”
“My sons no more will come in.
They fell beside our *Malik*,
I’m an empty churning skin.”

“My heart burns in this drear lowland
I need my lambs again,
I die for Tiari’s pastures,
They only can still my pain.”

MY SISTER!

“**Y**OUR hair was charcoal, it’s cotton white!”
“Know you not my man is gone?
He was slain on the bloody Jewish Hill,
In the grey of a winter dawn.”

“Your cheeks? They are strangely graven?”
“They are graven by grief and fear.
Asiat girl was found by the *Beg*,
Would she were on her bier!”

“O where is the light of your eyes?”
“Gone as I tried to pierce through
The rain of tears to fold on my breast,
My shrivelled babe—six—like two.”

HOW THE CONSUL WENT TO URMI

THE Kurds had overswept the plain
Of Urmi-by-the-Sea,
And in our yards, a massacre
Held horrid revelry.

The Kurds had overswept the plain.
The governor held some
As hostages or prisoners.
The Consul cried “Men, come!”

*And so we dared a hundred deaths
And found the road to pain.
We followed the flag to Urmī,
To Urmī-of-the-Plain.*

Tabriz to Sharif Khana,
We crawled on Russian rails:
Then went along on petrol.
(*Pood*, twenty, was the sale!)

We slept upon a mosque porch,
Way out in No Man's Land.
'Twixt lake and hills rode at us,
A Kurdish outpost band.

We'd pushed through sand toward Salmas.
The car leaped like a plane,
Swift shots sang ugly warning,
Our wheels beat swift refrain.

At Diliman, we halted
For permit to pass through.
Five days we parleyed Simko
And guileful Persian, too.

At last! (Our hearts grew haggard.)
We found the road again.
Was there a living Christian
On Urmī's blood-bought plain?

We climbed the pass. Night horsemen
Cried "Back! A fight's on there!"
We trailed a rough dry river—
Was treachery our fare?

We passed dead, war-worn hamlets,

To Kara Hassani,

And waited till the *Sirdar*

Saw Kurd and Irani.

He brought the sad glad tidings,

Six hundred friends were saved,

The Consul might now enter—

To hazard what he'd braved.

We dared a hundred divers deaths,

And found the road to pain.

We followed the flag to Urmi,

To Urmi-of-the-Plain!

THE REMNANT

Six hundred were crouched in court and room,

In the governor's palace. There—

With blasting bloody memories,

Nakedness, wounds, dull care.

The Counsul came like an angel

From God's own once blue skies,

To still the pain of aching souls,

Quicken dead lips and eyes.

There was nothing left on the face of earth

But broken homes and tears.

There was nothing left in women's hearts

But madness, death and fears.

Now, surely, God had remembered
His children of the plain.
Perhaps death's orgy neared an end,
He had sent life, again!

*Six hundred were crouched in court and room,
In the governor's palace. There—
With blasting bloody memories,
Nakedness, wounds, dull care.*

HOW THE CONSUL BROUGHT OUT THE SIX HUNDRED

*The Consul went to Urmi,
To Urmi-of-the-Plain.
He brought with him six hundred,
When he came out again.*

The Consul made a clear demand:
“The remnant must go free—
Six hundred, safe from Urmi, go—
No force, no treachery.”

By days of patient parleying,
The victory was won,
(Stone hearts were flesh when His hand touched),
And freedom's march begun.

A tense, slow movement through the streets,
Past myriad smouldering eyes,
Past close-clenched rifles, daggers keen—
First, two men brave and wise.

The broken remnant, *almost* free,
Trudged on for thirteen miles.

The Consul plodded last of all,
To hold the weakest files.

Six hundred gained the lakeport,
By fading sun, pale moon;
Six hundred reached Tabriz,—thanks to
The Consul and God's boon!

*The Consul went to Urmī,
To Urmī-of-the-Plain.
He brought with him six hundred,
When he came out again.*

CHRIST IN URMI

I.

THEY say that Urmī knows the Christ no more,
Our Urmī, little smiling patterned plain,
That quenched her thirst from great white Kurdish
peaks,
And gave us gardened fruits, rice, grapes and
grain.

Christ walks not by the Baranduz when morn
Paints alpen-glow across the snowy hills,
Nor speaks with herd boys as they drowse among
Their cattle through hot noons, long white and
still?

In shining vineyards with us He would toil,
As He had toiled a thousand goodly years,
For He's the Vine and we the branches slim,
He does not leave a vineyard dug in tears.

He loved our lake so heavenly blue and salt—
He's loved lakes since He walked Tiberias' Sea—
St. Thomas walked our sapphire lake, one day,
And brought Christ unto Urmi, gloriously.

Yet, first of all, the Wise Man brought the Babe,
The Babe divine that drew his seeking soul—
His dust lies in Mart Maryam, in the crypt,
His heart has known the joy of a won goal.

II.

We cannot see Him, now, His witnesses
Have walked the bloody way and gone to God,
Or eat a bitter bread in alien lands,
Or die in bonds that make soul stuff, a clod.
• • • • • • • • • • •
A fragrant Presence fills the patient void,
More sweet than holy chant or incensed prayer.
It moves across the pregnant martyred plain,
And bears a quiet brooding witness, there.
He breathes upon dim flickering hearts—
They know not that it is for Him, they wait,
For Him the Lord of Persia and the World,
For Him, not for the attared drug of fate.

Caravan Songs

IN THE CARAVANSERAI

THE caravanserai is choked
With humps and heads and packs,
Loose mouths lip up the dry chopped straw,
At ease the weary backs.
The gutteral calls of camel men
And shouts of slim tea boys,
Weave in with torch and endless tale,
To make the evening joys.

ON THE SEIR ROAD

THE camels have been on the hills
To feast. (Such camel-thorn!)
With stately shamble crowd the road.
We'll be tired out by morn!

The caravanserai awaits
With rope and burly pack,
And soon they'll ding-dong through the gate.
We know what humps our backs!

The city moat, the gardens fade,
The open plain is best
With stars and camel bells to sing.
Who knows our nightly quest?

AT SUNSET

’TIS sunset, and the caravan begins
To spell her mellow music to the stars.
The stately stepping line with swaying heads,
Flows black across the plain, in cadence far.

The din of the rude khan is changed for peace,
The tangled streets, bazaars for plenteous
space—
And I fold round my spirit with her robe
Of lustral evening grace.

THE CARAVAN IN THE STORM

A dusky splotch upon the waste!
Close-huddled camel forms!
(The humped-up packs lean awkwardly,
With stately heads down-drawn.)

The shaggy camel-men crouch low,
Blend with their shaggy troop,
Along the patient leeward side,
And watch the lightnings swoop.

They know the winds of these wide plains,
Their cloud-bursts, buffettings,
And with sea-wisdom make all taut,
Wait Allah’s signalling.

OF CARAVANS

I.

THE caravans link day with day,
As they feel across the plain.
From dusk to dawn they rhythm along,
To their *tink-de-le-dong* refrain.

And I would I knew their ancient song
Of dim bazaar and khan,
Of camel-thorn on tawny hills,
And tracks to Hamadan.

Yet these are not the golden strands
Of their full-throated din.
I hear of brigands, dagger cries,
And midnight tramps with *djinn*;

Of velvet skies all mellowed sheen,
And brim to brim with stars;
Of truant worlds, on August nights—
They flash like scimitars!

II.

The caravans link land with land
Across the roof of the world:
Old Chinistan with Turkistan,
Old Gulistan—Iran.

And as they link up race with race,
They link up age with age:
They bind the Shah to the ancient Khan,
Ibn Sina to latest sage.

And I have heard they link our earth
To heaven, night by night;
As their old bell voices touch the sky,
And the stars lean down with their light.

BY GOD'S CLEAR PLOTTED STARS

THE stars flash out, and space is luminous,
Heat-stricken day has passed—
Its glare and dust, in the deep wells of night,
Are drowned at last.

The stars gleam bright, and camel-bells begin
Their travel songs, high, baritone and bass.
Gaunt silhouettes step ghostlike cross the plain,
With slow and rhythmic pace.

The stars shine on. The swaying caravan
Moves forward to the tune of answering bells.
The nodding drivers dream of Samarkand,
The leader, finds the track, the hour tells—
By God's clear plotted stars.

THE JULFA ROAD

(In Autumn)

NO stately swinging caravans
Step down the Julfa Road,
With sugar, oil and calico
And bell tunes for their load!

Across the Aras where women flung
Their babes in mad despair,
The road runs south by pass and plain,
To the Gate of Kurdeshahar.

No pied herds on the plains,
No wheat upon the hills,
No raisins in the vineyards,
Silent, the droning mills.

The buffalo pools are empty,
The houses are broken and bare;
Hunger and Kurd and typhus have supped
On the flesh of the poor folk, there.

No stately swinging caravans
Step down the Julfa Road,
With sugar, oil and calico
And bell tunes for their load!

AGELESS RHYTHMS

THE soul of man, wood, brass and string
Weave a surpassing wonder thing
That marches us where men are made,
And wings us sunward, unafraid.

A shepherd's pipe in Thessaly,
Calls out the very heart of me;
A bearded moujik's minor strain
Sums up earth's uttermost of pain.

The *tar* picks out its tinkling tune,
To teach us Layli and Majnun,
The ram's horn wails forth blasts of doom,
Shakes crooked streets, mud roofs, white room.

The camel-bells sing timeless songs
Of rhythmic nights, star sprinkled, long.
Bokhara, Khiva, Samarkand,
I greet you all above Marand.

Libraries, poets, sages, khans
Of ancient Persia—Turkistan,
Your crumbling walls and camel-strings
Now send us magic carpetings.

Your treble, basso, minor bells
Make melodies too strange to spell.
Their ageless rhythms do not die,
But weave their earth rhyme with the sky—
And the spirits of caravan-men.

A JOURNEY SONG

I slept a space within a village crude,
 Quiet simple folk—a handful—dwelt therein.
I felt the cramping of the thick mud walls,
 The unconscious lives that straitly hemmed me in.

Then strange bell voices came from out the night,
 The caravan called to the hamlet, me,
And touched us with the life of many climes,
 Of empires old and young and yet to be.

LAST NIGHT

LAST night, my soul was cadenced to the slow
 Sure gutteral rhythm of caravans that go
Across unending moon-bleached plains—their rhyme,
Coeval with the birth of dimmest time.

TODAY

TODAY, I'll fly upon a stallion white,
 A stallion sired in hidden tents of Nejd;
Then clasp my fragrant silvered water-pipe,
And dream old tales before Mohammed bred.

ANCIENT TRAILS OF TRAFFIC

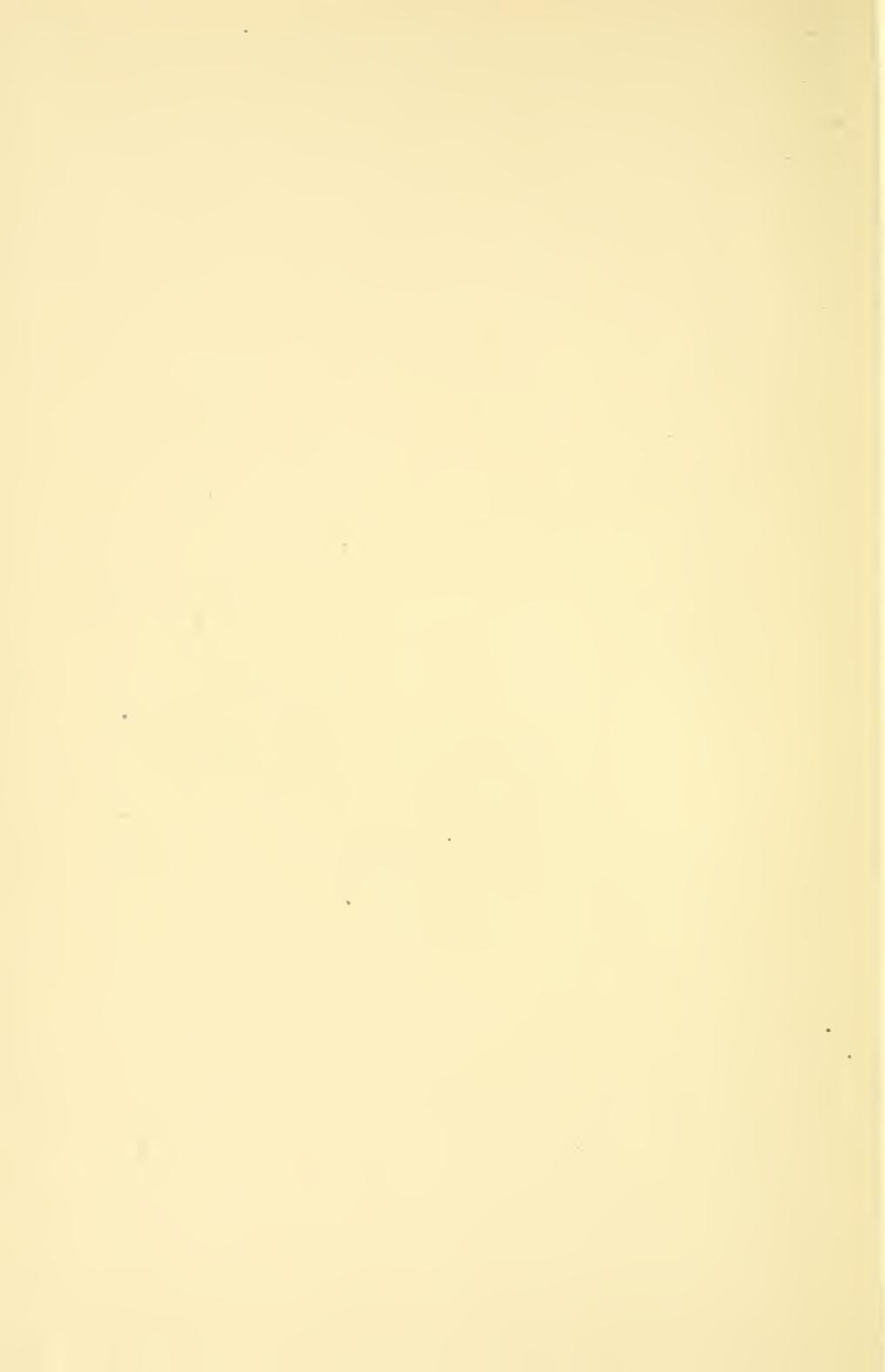
DOWN ancient trails of traffic,
The shaggy camels swing.
As in the days of Tamerlane,
Their wandering bell-songs ring.

The shadow of holy Ararat,
Follows them through the night,
And blesses them with her miracle,
As dawn becomes new light.

They splash across the Arras
And climb the Tabriz road,
By Shah Abbas' ruined khan,
Where camel-ghosts unload.

They breast the pass, where yesterday,
Machine guns echoed death,
Where bearded Cossack and wild-eyed Kurd
Stole each other's breath.

The stately bell-tones seem to toll
Those fierce hearts passing on
To a PLACE more passionately loved
Than Kurdistan or the Don.



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